

# Realistic Training at Base Camp Near Front

## Outline of British Methods Shows How the American Soldiers Are Being Taught—Trenches Flooded With Gas for Practice

The following account of a base camp in France, furnished by a British officer now in New York, shows the kind of training which American troops under General Pershing are receiving near the battlefield.

**T**ROOPS arriving in France from England proceed to a base camp as soon as they are debarked. These camps are capable of accommodating many thousands, and training grounds have been laid out close to them. The men are housed in tents, and there are huts for the camp officers, mess-rooms, and so on. It has been necessary to construct special railway sidings to serve them, and light and water have also to be laid on. There are recreation huts controlled by churches of all denominations, Salvation Army and Y. M. C. A. huts and a cinema hut.

Grounds have been laid out for bayonet fighting, and bombing pitches and a trench system for teaching trench fighting and trench engineering arranged. There are also dugouts which can be filled with asphyxiating gas to illustrate practically the efficiency of the gas helmet, and lecture rooms, in one case amphitheatres dug out of the sand, with their walls reinforced with petrol tins. At one of the camps the instruction staff consists of about 200 officers and non-commissioned officers, the majority of whom are sent down from the front for a few months from the formations which the drafts at the base will join.

Troops from England arrive at the base camps completely equipped for the front, with the exception of their rifles and side arms, and these are issued immediately on arrival. They are then classified under one of three headings, under which all men at the base fall, either as requiring further training, or as not at present available for reinforcements, or as ready to proceed to the front at once. Demands for reinforcements from units at the front pass through General Headquarters to the base commandant, who sends men up to join their regiments as they complete their training at the base. As far as possible men are sent to join units of their own regiments, but this is not in every case possible.

When the soldier lands in France an important branch of his training is still before him. The advantages of completing training in France were recognized early in the war, and the system has grown from that of imparting a little technical knowledge, likely to be of value under the special conditions at the front, to an essential branch of the soldier's education. In the first place it is easier to provide instructors at the base camps by the system already noticed; the country in which the camps are situated is admirably suited for manoeuvres, while ground of this nature in England is limited, and finally the breach between leaving England and arriving at the front is less pronounced if a short time is spent at a base training camp on the way.

This short, but important, course of training is designed partly to maintain the degree of discipline and physical fit-

ness attained in England and partly to insure that a sufficiently high standard of efficiency is reached before the men leave for the front. It was found in the earlier periods of the war that men drafted from reserve units at home had not all reached the same level of efficiency, and the course at the base not only insures that this level is reached but tends to make uniform the training of men coming out from a large number of different units at home. Officers and noncommissioned officers are separated from their men, and trained independently, and no man is permitted to leave the base until he has satisfied the commandant that he has reached the required standard.

As a preliminary to his course at the base, the man fires a short musketry course on the 30-yard range there. It is usually found that the accuracy of the shooting is good, and subsequent musketry instruction is of a technical or theoretical nature, consisting of fire direction and control practices, carried out on "landscape" targets, and rapid loading and aiming, the necessity for which the war has justified probably more fully than any other branch of training.

After this preliminary, instruction is developed in two main directions: that of maintaining physical efficiency and accustoming men to some extent to the exertions which will be required of them, and that of supplying them with certain technical or special knowledge which will be of service to them under conditions prevailing at the front.

The training of the men's physique is not confined to the Aldershot course of physical drill, though this has its

place in the schedule. It is considered that the demands made on the physique of the troops in this war call for special training, under conditions approximating, as far as possible, those existing at the front. Men are practiced in advancing, carrying their arms, ammunition, and kit as they would carry them in the attack, and are shown in a practical manner that, unless the advance is slow and steady, they will be too exhausted for fighting before they reach their objective.

They are required to jump trenches, bars, and other obstacles, carrying their fighting kit, with the object of demonstrating to them, in a practical manner, what is required of fighting troops at the front. Bayonet fighting also plays a prominent part of this section of their training. The war has revolutionized our ideas of the use of the bayonet. In the old days there were those who regarded it as a weapon whose uses had passed, but there are probably more at the front today who regard the rifle without its bayonet in that light. The men are taught to use their bayonets in a practical way by attacking a stuffed sack suspended a few feet above the ground from a horizontal bar; points are marked on the sack, at which they are required to aim their strokes.

An exercise is carried out in which two opposing ranks lunge at each other with poles, the ends of which are padded with sacking, alternately parrying each other's thrusts. Another stroke, which hand-to-hand fighting in the confined space of the trenches has introduced, is the "short jab," an upward thrust, made in a crouching position, with the bayonet

held a few inches from the face. Men are taught to carry their bayonets in this position as they advance along the trenches; if an opponent is met, it is at once ready for use.

Although much of the work is necessarily practical, close order drill, upon which all good soldiering is based, has its place in the training scheme at the bases. There are bands in the camps, which play the troops to and from their training ground, and the discipline and soldierly bearing learned on the parade ground in England are not allowed to evaporate. A man who cannot do his barrack square drill may not go to the front.

The special conditions of trench warfare have necessitated much technical training in weapons which are neither new nor modifications of appliances formerly thought obsolete. The grenade has come into its own again, and a weapon, in the use of which no training at all was given before the war, (except a little instruction in the rifle grenade,) is now the most effective small arm in the hands of the infantry.

Gas also has become a contingency to which men must be accustomed during their training, and trench engineering and allied subjects, such as the construction of wire entanglements, call for special instruction before drafts are fit to take their place in the trenches. At the base camps a careful course of grenade throwing is carried out. At first the men are taught to hold and throw dummy grenades, and before leaving all are practiced in throwing live bombs, and confidence in their use is inspired in them. Drill in adjusting gas helmets occupies a prominent place in the course, and the care necessary to maintain the efficiency of the helmets is explained to the men. They are passed through a dugout filled with asphyxiating gas, and the efficiency of the apparatus with which they are supplied is practically demonstrated. Gas is more dangerous to the morale of the troops than to their actual safety, and this demonstration of its harmlessness, if the right steps are taken to counteract it, through which every man going to the front must pass, does much to disarm the gas attack of its worst terrors.

Before going to the front the men are also taught how to put up wire entanglements, working on a system by which the greatest amount of wire can be put up in the shortest time with the least confusion; this work is performed in full kit, and the men are taught it like drill, until they can carry it out at night in perfect silence. Filling sandbags and similar work is carried out in the same way, and the night work of the trenches is reproduced as far as possible. In the trench systems which have been constructed at the camps, flare lights are used, and with their assistance the men practice in detecting patrols, working parties, and so forth.

Not only troops from the United Kingdom go through this course of training at the base camps. Drafts for the colonial armies train there with the English troops, and the association in the camps, though a short one, tends to inspire mutual confidence in the trenches.